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ABSTRACT

The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans and a White House Advisory Commission of leaders concerned with the education of Hispanic Americans sent a survey to 32 federal agencies. Results show that most agencies have not adequately monitored Hispanic participation in the educational programs they sponsored. The Commission and the Initiative have issues a report on the current state of Hispanic American education that paints a somber picture of the quality of education opportunities afforded most Hispanic Americans. A series of recommendations on steps the Federal government could take accompanied the Commission's report. The Secretary of Education agreed to have the Department of Education be a model agency to implement the report's recommendations, and other agencies have agreed to develop similar action frameworks. The Commission and the Initiative have established steering partnerships to work toward the implementation of report recommendations. In addition, a clearinghouse of information on strategies, research, practices, scholarships, fellowships, grants, and other pertinent documents has been established. (SLD)

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Educational Excellence for Hispanics: A White House Initiative

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Many studies have explored the lost opportunities that characterizes the reality of so many Hispanics on the eve of the 21st century. Far too many are still trapped in linguistic ghettoes, fail to reach their highest academic potential and remain entrenched among the lower paid echelons in the nation.

Nationally, Hispanic students account for nearly 15% of America's public elementary and secondary school enrollment. In some states, more than one-third of school age children are Hispanic such as Texas with 36 percent and California with 38 percent.

Hispanics interested in the education of Hispanic Americans have not been too encouraged by the efforts of President William Clinton to help Hispanics. Many are disappointed and some feel particularly betrayed since the vast majority of Hispanics voted overwhelmingly for Clinton in both presidential elections.

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A recent Presidential appointment may provide Clinton an opportunity to focus on and address the educational needs of Hispanics.

In August 1997, President Clinton named Dr. Sarita E. Brown, then assistant dean of academic affairs at American University, to be the new Executive Director of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans. As such, she heads an interagency working group responsible for providing staff, resources, and assistance for the President and the Secretary of Education to address their responsibilities concerning education and Hispanic Americans.

Before coming to American University, Dr. Brown was a senior fellow at the American Council on Education's office of Minorities in Higher Education. She has also held educational positions with the American Association for Higher Education and at the University of Texas at Austin.

The White House Initiative & the Commission

The President's the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans was originally created in 1994. It is an interagency working group responsible for planning and implementing educational support programs.

An Advisory Commission, composed of a distinguished group of educators, businessmen, and political leaders deeply involved in and concerned with the education of Hispanic Americans was created at the same time. Its 24 members were sworn in by Vice President Al Gore on February 1, 1995. The White House press release on the swearing-in ceremony detailed the Commissioners' responsibilities.

They have four major responsibilities

1. to advise President Clinton and Education Secretary Riley on the progress of Hispanic Americans toward achievement of the National Education Goals.
2. to monitor and coordinate the various Federal efforts to promote high-quality education for Hispanic Americans.
3. to propose ways to increase state, private sector, and community involvement in improving education;

4. and finally they have been asked to recommend how Federal education initiatives can be expanded and improved.

Members of the Commission serve without pay and meet every few months in Washington, DC The Commission is chaired by Dr. Ana Guzman, a well-known Texas Community College leader with extensive experience involving the education of Hispanic Americans.

Since their appointment public meetings have been hosted in such diverse sections of the country as Phoenix, New York, Los Angeles, San Antonio and as many of you know, San Juan, Puerto Rico as well. They convened expert panels to address issues directly related to education and Hispanics. Their topics have included:

1. Early Childhood Development,
2. Access to Higher Education,
3. Hispanic Educational Attrition,
4. School Finance: Reform and Equity,
5. Hispanic Progress Toward Goals 2000
6. Successful Programs.

Coordination

In addition to their responsibility to gather, analyze, and publicize relevant facts on the state of education for Hispanic Americans, the Commission and the Initiative staff also have an important role to play within the Federal government. The Executive Order creating the Commission and the Initiative charged each Executive department and executive agency to "provide appropriate information requested by the Commission or the staff of the Initiative."

It was hoped that a systematic collection of data relating to the eligibility for and participation by Hispanic Americans in Federal education programs would assist and encourage others to participate. The progress of Hispanic Americans in relation to the National Educational Goals is to be monitored as well.

The Federal government has a large number of programs scattered across various departments and agencies that affect, directly and indirectly, the education of Hispanic Americans. These efforts often are carried out independently without knowing what other departments and agencies are doing. In addition, prior to the

creation of the Commission and Initiative, no means existed for obtaining an overall view of Federal government programs that affect the education of Hispanic Americans.

Further each Federal department and agency with a relevant program has been asked to appoint a senior official to act as a liaison with the Commission and Initiative staff.

As a first step to gathering information about programs from the various departments and agencies and for gaining an overall view of Federal government efforts, the Commission and Initiative staff created and sent out an inventory to 32 Federal agencies.

They were asked to provide the following information: a) the dollar amounts of awards per component, a composite of the component, and the number of programs for each component/program; b) the number of participants for each program; and, c) the total number of Hispanic Americans/Latinos participating in each program.

The results point out that the majority of agencies have not adequately monitored Hispanic participation in the educational programs they sponsored. Most agencies do not systematically collect data on the distribution of their grants and other benefits. Therefore the government lacks critical information as to where, and how equitably, those dollars are actually distributed.

Many agencies had not thought of their programs previously in that fashion. This points to the value of an interagency group with a White House mandate, such as the Commission and Initiative staff have, in endeavoring to bring into sharper focus the scattered programs of the Federal government. One of Sarita Brown's many important tasks as the new Executive Director will be coordinating this interagency effort.

Special Assistant Edmundo De Leon recently told us that the Commission had been re-energized with Dr. Brown's appointment was in the process of addressing their agenda.

The Report

Building upon their hearings, surveys and other sources of information, one important result of the Commission work, assisted

by the Initiative staff, was the report Our Nation on the Fault Line: Hispanic American Education.

Presented to President Clinton in September 1996, the report surveyed the current state of Hispanic American education. It unearthed and painted a somber picture of the quality of educational opportunities afforded most Hispanics.

It highlighted what it characterized as a "disturbing crisis" : the poor condition of education for Hispanics. It found that in studying all measures of educational attainment between Hispanic Americans and other Americans a significant and increasing gap exists.

A series of recommendations on steps the Federal government and others could take to improve Hispanic American educational opportunities accompanied the Commission's call for strong corrective action.

Commenting on the report, Dr. Brown noted, "The needs of our community have been articulated, and those who shape national policy have been alerted to our agenda. Now the challenge is to focus the energy we have generated and move to strategic action."

Vice President Gore on behalf of Clinton committed to utilize the "report as a blueprint to address the education needs and challenges of Hispanic Americans."

Secretary Riley agreed to have the Department of Education be a model agency to implement the report's recommendations. Specific offices within the department have assume the responsibility to develop programs geared to Hispanics. Other Federal agencies, after reviewing the recommendations for action have agreed to develop similar action frameworks.

At these and other coordination meetings it was agreed that 1. the condition of education for Hispanic Americans is a disturbing national crisis, 2. action needs to be taken now, in the short and long range future, and 3. recurring meetings are needed to identify and steer action.

The Future

The Commission and the Initiative have begun to move from Vision to Action to help facilitate needed changes and implement the report. They have established steering partnerships with the White House National Economic Council, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Education Committee and Cabinet Secretaries of various pertinent branches of the federal government.

The following committees have been formed to develop a framework for action: 1. Children, Family and the Community, 2. K-12, 3. Higher Education, 4. Public Policy and 5. Foundations, Corporations and Public Affairs.

Educational Clearing House

To apprise all interested in the Initiative a clearing house of information regarding educational strategies, research, practices scholarships, fellowships, grants and other pertinent documents has been established.

We urge all of you as interested fellow Americans to pursue these sources on information.
For those interested in the Commission's report and other relevant material contact:
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